

Talking Points
Statehood Day
Thursday, December 10, 2009

Beautiful, historic Old Capitol

A fitting state museum that has been spectacularly re-done since Hurricane Katrina.

Some of you may know that William Nichols, who designed this Old Capitol, also designed the Governor's Mansion and the Lyceum at Ole Miss – as well as the old state penitentiary that once stood on the site of the New Capitol.

Mr. Nichols designed state capitol buildings in North Carolina, Alabama, and Louisiana, as well as Mississippi. He was a busy fellow, and we are blessed by his work.

My own family's deep roots in Mississippi go back two hundred years, before statehood. My great-great-great-great grandfather Louie LeFleur, had a trading post a few blocks south of here, on LeFleur's Bluff.

He did business with the Choctaws and other tribes, but left to go to French Camp and got away from all the hubbub before this Capitol was built.

I can only imagine what he might say about Mississippi today.

During the early years of the Old Capitol, the building housed all three branches of state government. Political discourse and judicial deliberations centered on the most profound issues in our country's history, from slavery to secession to suffrage to property rights.

The exhibits in the Old Capitol Museum explore the decisions made here during that era, emphasizing their impact even today, more than a century later.

The men (and it was all men back then) who met here, indeed, the men who envisioned the new State of Mississippi, faced daunting obstacles to carve civilization out of 47,000 square miles of wilderness.

On this 192nd anniversary of Mississippi's entry into the United States of America, our state remains complex, our political processes somewhat cumbersome.

We are in a family of states that face common issues and yet we have the courage to find our own unique solutions.

Unlike the federal government, Mississippi must balance its budget. Today, the role of state government is to deliver essential services as effectively and efficiently as possible.

Today, we, too, face daunting obstacles.

But the one constant is the spirit, strength, and resiliency of our people.

Through wars, a Great Depression, floods, and the terror of the worst natural disaster in American history – Hurricane Katrina – Mississippians have always stood tall.

Mississippians make major contributions every day in every facet of life.

It is said that the people get the government they deserve. I say in every positive meaning of that phrase, may it forever be so – because the people deserve the very best its leaders have to offer.